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ABSTRACT

Evergreen State College is an unprecedented flexible, sophisticated educational instrument designed to avoid depersonalization. Students are treated as responsible adults and are expected to work closely, as colleagues, with their teachers. Curriculum planning reflects the belief that graduates would change their career pattern and life styles at least three times during their adult years. Instruction is grouped under natural sciences, social sciences, and the arts and humanities, instead of by departments. Courses are multidisciplinary and must be relevant not only to today's society but to the problems of future generations. Grades are based on narrative achievement reports instead of letter grades. The academic program is divided between coordinated and contractual studies. "Access" is the key work for the generic multimedia workshop library. Audio tapes and books share adjoining shelves, with thousands of visuals stored on microfiche. Television monitors and computer time-shared terminals are available for student use. Equipment checkout ranges from slide projectors to video cameras and VTR's. The library media production facility includes graphic artists and technicians; two complete television production studios; "hands-on" filmmaking equipment; and, in addition to musical instruments, a complete audio studio. (WCM)

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Evergreen: Profile of a New College

By Don H. Coombs and James J. Prevel

Imagine for a moment that you have been given a special assignment. You have been called into the conference room to hear the announcement:

"Your responsibility is to build a great new school. There are no set ground rules, no previous mistakes to live with. No traditions. Only the dedication to create a model curriculum which others may follow and emulate. And, of course, you'll be given minimal capital to work with, so you will need to allocate your resources carefully . . .

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"The institution is to be called The Evergreen State College--and its campus will nestle in the picturesque forest country of Olympia, Washington. Mt. Rainier is part of the scenery, majestic and photogenic off to the east.

"Your first-year enrollment will be 1100 students, all of whom are hungry to learn new things, all of whom have heard that Evergreen will be unique in many ways. They represent what editorial writers have called 'The Disenchanted Generation,' or 'The Communications Generation,' and they're a contemporary group looking for contemporary education or, perhaps, a lot more than that."

That's your assignment. Where would you best begin?

Such a challenge was faced recently by a group of men and women charged with the responsibility of creating "The Evergreen State College" in the hill country of Olympia, Washington. This article briefly documents what happened.

Genesis and Direction

The genesis of Evergreen State was sparked by initial proposals and planning in 1964, followed by enabling legislation in 1967. Full scale operational blueprinting began shortly after. Governor Dan Evans called for a "flexible and sophisticated educational instrument rather than a vast immobile establishment." A consultant study urged that Evergreen "should avoid the depersonalization common in higher education; students, as responsible adults, should expect to work closely, as colleagues, with their teachers . . ." The study further

recommended that narrative achievement reports be used instead of conventional letter grades, that most academic effort should grow out of agreements mutually negotiated between student and teacher, and that student motivation and progress were the prime elements of concern, taking precedence over "prescribed courses . . . and conventional research patterns."

Formal compartmentalization and departmentalization were avoided by grouping instruction under three deans operating within the broad parameters of natural sciences, social sciences, and the arts and humanitites. In many instances the courses themselves were multi-disciplinary and diverse in both their philosophy of organization and areas of study. Among the early titles: "Life on Earth," "Image and Idea," "Mind and Body," "Human Development," "Man and Art," "Communications and Intelligence."

Each course was built on the thesis that the content must be relevant to the problems of today's society--and the challenges to be faced by future generations. In planning the curriculum, it was noted that most of Evergreen's graduates would change their career patterns--and life styles--at least three times during their adult years, and that the curriculum must remain flexible and responsive in preparing those students for the changing world which was waiting for them beyond the gates of the college. That flexibility was evidenced in an early bulletin describing the curriculum:

> "At Evergreen, we wish to keep our offerings flexible and responsive to teachers' and

> students' developing perceptions of what is worth doing: Accordingly, unlike most other colleges, we do not have courses or programs which are repeated in the same form, year in and year out.
>
> "Only exceptionally will a program be repeated, and then only with a significantly modified design and with changes in the faculty team leading it.
>
> "You should not expect, therefore, to find these programs in operation next year. Even if some of the program titles appear again and even if some of the same faculty team-members are involved, the programs will have been largely altered by the experience of the first year and the perceived need of new groups of students."

As one observer remarked at the time, "Evergreen is determined to make 'relevancy' a watchword. And most of all, we are trying to innoculate ourselves against the common disease among educational institutions known as 'hardening of the categories."

Classes began on September 27, 1971

A Twin Academic Program: Coordinated and Contracted Studies

The academic program was divided into two general headings: Coordinated Studies and Contracted Studies. Quoting from an early Evergreen course bulletin:

> "Coordinated Studies programs are small cooperative learning communities. They usually involve some 100 students and

five faculty members. The relative compactness makes a number of benefits possible--close relationships among student members and faculty; opportunities for genuine collaboration in learning; and a sense of direct, unified responsibility for one's work.

"The programs now offered explore some of man's most urgent problems, his most important challenges, and his most highly prized values. The faculty come from many different backgrounds and bring their special experience to bear in a common effort to cut across the usual boundaries between academic disciplines.

"Instead of studying, for example, Sociology, Economics, or Psychology as disparate, self-justifying fields, you will study central problems or themes by learning to make use of appropriate techniques from such disciplines. Instead of accumulating bits of data in an attempt to "cover a field," with emphasis on passing impersonal examinations, you will be responsible for shaping and documenting your ideas to make them count.

"In Contracted Studies, you can sign up with a faculty member or other staff member to earn credit by doing a project--carrying out an investigation, mastering a skill or set of skills, attacking a set of problems, creating a piece of work, or otherwise dealing with a specific body of subject matter.

"We call this arrangement a "contract" for learning. It is an agreement to carry out a project, and it implies direct, mutual responsibility between you and the experienced person whom you have asked to help you. It is a flexible yet demanding method for satisfying your interests and needs within the available resources of Evergreen: the experienced people, the facilities, the materials, and the opportunities which the College can arrange for you to work with other people and in other facilities off campus.

"Self-paced learning units will play a major part. You can use units to develop basic skills in mathematics, scientific techniques and the communication skills, as necessary to carry out an investigation.

"At an early stage in the planning of Evergreen, President McCann said that 'the most valuable service Evergreen can offer is to initiate a process of continuing learning by preparing a student with the methods of learning and experimentation, by encouraging independence in pursuit of inquiries that interest and motivate him, and by providing him with counsel and resources to test this knowledge and ability.' And as a pattern complementing the Coordinated Studies programs, the Contracted Studies will help you to work more and more on your own. . ."

The "Generic Library"

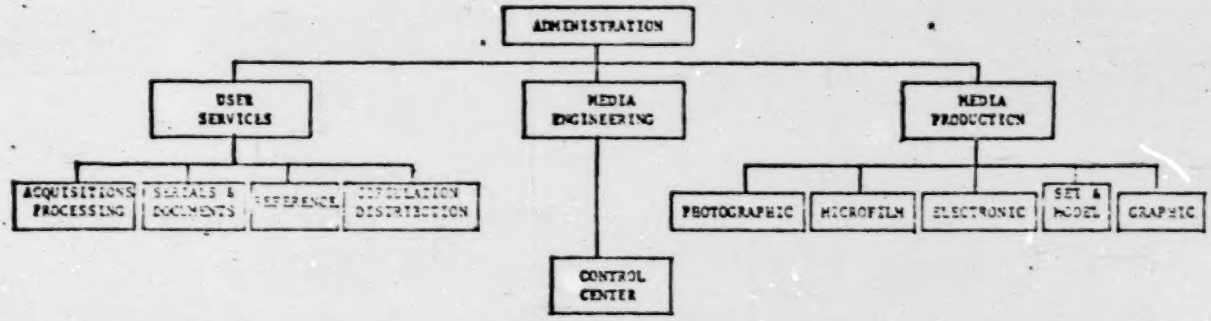
Evergreen's planners realized the importance of creating a library which could serve as a central learning place for the college's multiple

academic experiences. A flexible resource center for the accessing, assimulation, and synthesis of ideas. A storehouse not just of books and periodicals, but of any and all media which could assist the students of Evergreen in their individual study and development.

The 1973 College Bulletin states that "If there is anything archaic about the library at Evergreen, it probably is the term 'Library.' Webster defines a library as 'a room or building where a collection of books, etc. is kept for reading or reference.' Evergreen certainly has a collection of books, but it is the 'etc.' that makes our library distinctive."

The "etc." includes 2,000 periodicals, hundreds of printed reference sources, 8500 audio recordings, 15,000 slides, models, art prints, maps, and a number of films and videotapes. The collection, plus over 80,000 books, is called a "generic" library because it is designed as an access place for <u>any</u> idea stored within <u>any</u> medium which can help make learning happen.

The Library Group is organized as shown below:



The library has professional staff (librarians, media specialists) heading up most of the functional areas at this time, but it is projected that para-professionals and clerical personnel will largely be responsible for the general maintenance of administrative activities--thereby freeing the professional staff to work closely with students

and faculty in supporting what a recent directive called "the true goals and function of the library. . ."

According to the library philosophy, "A library need not be a museum, or worse, an unused mausoleum. It can be, and should be, a workshop . . . and a great repository for learning resources of all kinds."

"Access" is a key word, and much of the library's resources are readily available for hands-on utilization. Audio tapes and books share adjoining shelves, thousands of visuals are stored for quick scanning on microfiche, and television monitors and computer time-shared terminals are readily available for student use. An equipment check-out desk expedites the loan of audio-visual systems ranging from slide projectors to filmstrip players to video cameras and VTRs.

Workshops which run three hours long are periodically arranged to ensure that students understand the proper maintenance and operation of the equipment to be borrowed. Additionally, the user can elect to purchase insurance to cover equipment damage or loss during the period of loan. The relatively low cost (50 cents for the first twenty four hours, 10 cents per day thereafter) is billed to the student monthly by the college business office.

Evergreen's planners have been especially gratified with the practical usefulness of microfiche for storage and retrieval. The college owns its own photo-reduction camera, and to date has used microform conversion for color art slides, student photography and portfolios, library card catalogs (including several drawers from off-campus sources), operating and repair manuals, and administrative transcripts and correspondence. In some instances, microfiche are stored with audio cassettes in special "multi-media" folders for student loan.

The microform utilization program was initially introduced through a series of workshops and meetings with faculty and administrative personnel at the College. According to Dr. Robert Barnard, an Evergreen faculty member, "Microfiche technology was treated the same way as any new concept at Evergreen. If it looks promising and helpful, we try it. And in this case, information storage on microfiche has been practical, efficient and cost-effective."

The Generic Library: Additional Features

Other features of Evergreen's Generic Library include

Media Production: Facilties and supervisory personnel are provided for continuing support of student Contracted Studies and self-paced learning programs. The staff includes full-time graphic artists and photographic laboratory technicians.

Television: The Library has two production studios and a full complement of cameras, control equipment, and video tape recorders. Recently, the college adopted a policy to purchase quality student-produced programs on a time-and-materials basis, to encourage the involvement of a growing number of young producer-directors. (As a recent example, students in the Communications and Intelligence program produced a public affairs documentary on half-inch videotape to influence County Commissioners on the importance of revising commercial zoning policies.)

Motion Pictures: Control consoles, interlock projectors and all required production equipment are provided for Evergreen's student filmmakers. The college believes that such hands-on experience greatly contributes to a developing critical perception of mass media's role in society.

Audio: A complete studio permits a full range of sound recording, mixing, dubbing, and duplication. In conjunction with the recording studio are separate music rooms with an organ, two pianos, and an electronic synthesizer.

Media Switching Center: The entire campus is wired for television and separate audio transmission, with a signal switching center located adjacent to the media production facilities. Plans call for the center to be tied to the local cable television system, for eventual origination and distribution of college productions for the community.

Conclusion and Caveat

This brief paper only begins to describe the promise and

potential of the Evergreen State College. To sense the magnitude of that potential, it is helpful to walk through the campus and see for yourself . . . clusters of students in animated dialogue with instructors, working as colleagues . . . a young woman sitting intently at a computer terminal, solving a complex equation--while a few steps away, two students are playing blackjack on a teletypewriter, interacting with the same computer . . . a freshman with his motion picture camera in a nearby woods, shooting the final sequence of his new film . . . a second year student in conference with his advisor, as they rewrite the student's program to fit changing career objectives.

There have been, of course, the usual logistical and tactical problems associated with starting a new institution, but on the whole, Evergreen's first days have been remarkably smooth. The planned expansion did run into some complications this past year. For one thing, hindsight suggests that opening Evergreen and expanding the state's junior college system may each have been a desirable action, but that doing both at the same time may have been unwise. Washington, like almost every state, has budget-balancing problems, and a strict enrollment limit has been clamped on at Evergreen and other state schools. This has been used to justify some pruning of positions in the college's administrative chain of command. At the same time, student interest in the Evergreen approach seems to be holding up, or even increasing, as judged by the number of applications to enroll.

A continuing question, not to be answered for several years, is "Can Evergreen hold true to its name--and keep its vision and willingness to remain green and growing?" The school began without precedents. Now it has some. It began without traditions. Some of those are being established, too, as traditions will grow within any repeating social order. But what happens when today's innovation becomes tomorrow's standard operating procedure, and students remind us that we have fallen behind again? It may not happen in Olympia, Washington, of course, but . . .

Perhaps every five or ten years Evergreen, along with every other school of higher learning, should call a special mass meeting, attended by the Faculty and Administration and Board of Trustees. And as the meeting opens, minds would open, too. And the speaker would begin. "Your responsibility is to build a great new school . . . "